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SUBJECT: ORANGUTAN CONSERVATION INDONESIA

1.(U) SUMMARY: Embassy Jakarta Charge d'Affaires and USAID/Indonesia Mission Director led a 9-person U.S. delegation to Central Kalimantan province on Indonesian Borneo May 23-25, 2007 to monitor progress of the U.S.-funded orangutan conservation programs, meet with local government and national park officials, and introduce broader assistance for these endangered great apes and their habitat. The trip, guided by renowned orangutan scientist Dr. Birute Galdikas, affirmed for USG representatives the serious threats to orangutan habitat in Indonesia, and the importance of the work undertaken through the USAID Orangutan Conservation Services Program (OCSF).

2. (U) The group's conclusion is that immediate and critical interventions are needed to prevent the conversion of primary forest into deforested land and the resulting permanent loss of this valuable forest resource and the mega biodiversity it supports. END SUMMARY.

Broadening Partnerships for Conservation

3. (U) Indonesia has experienced sharp declines in total orangutan population in recent years, driven by forest conversion for palm oil plantations, forest fires, logging and mining. Poor land use decisions accelerated the loss of forest habitat, following the push toward decentralization and the economic crisis of 1997-1998. Second tier threats include hunting and the illicit wildlife trade. The decline of this great ape warrants a sense of urgency. In Sumatra, the situation is critical with only 7,000-7,500 orangutans surviving in a fragmented forest landscape. Some 43,000 Bornean orangutans remain, but while their numbers are greater than are those on Sumatra, they are also at risk being scattered over almost 50 geographically isolated areas, several of which experts believe are unsustainable over the long term. Recent predictions indicate that the orangutan could be virtually extinct by 2050 if current trends of habitat destruction and degradation continue unabated.

3. (U) Orangutan habitat conservation is a specific priority for the U.S. Congress. USAID has actively promoted this objective in Indonesia since 2001, focusing \$11.5 million of congressionally-directed funding over the period FY2004-2008 as a key investment to help Indonesia preserve the world's last two remaining areas with significant orangutan populations in the wild: the islands of Kalimantan and Sumatra. In March 2007, USAID initiated a new 3-year \$8 million Orangutan Conservation Services Project (OCSF) to safeguard stronghold populations by reducing or removing current threats and influencing major drivers of those threats at specific sites, as well as at the policy and institutional levels. OCSF goals are to reduce threat levels to select orangutan populations; mobilize stakeholders at various levels around land use policy and decisions; establish improved networks among law enforcement and conservation management, and; create sustainable financing mechanisms in support of long-term

conservation at key sites. Development Alternatives, Inc. implements OSCP in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, Orangutan Foundation International, and other NGOs.

Local Government Welcomes Park Protection

14. (SBU) During their visit, the U.S. delegation met with the Regent of Kotawaringin Barat District, Mr. Ujang Iskandar, key representatives of government agencies including a member of the provincial parliament, and military based in the district. The Regent expressed strong commitment to protecting the Park and welcomed U.S. collaboration with the regency government to assist in its conservation efforts. Mr. Iskandar emphasized the need for coordination among levels of government, as well as prevention of encroachments into the Park. Further, the delegation discussed with him the potential for economic development concurrent with orangutan conservation, focusing on agriculture and eco-tourism.

Camp Leakey Field Research

15. (U) The U.S. delegation visited Tanjung Puting National Park (TPNP), in Central Kalimantan province, guided by renowned orangutan specialist, Dr. Birute Galdikas, and the Head of TPNP, Mr. Bambang Darmaja. Tanjung Puting supports an orangutan population estimated at 6,000, making it the second largest single population in the world. At 400,000 hectares of fairly intact habitat, TPNP is home to some 180 species of mammals, 17 species of reptiles, and 220 species of birds. In 1971, Dr. Birute Galdikas founded Camp Leakey in TPNP, naming it after acclaimed scientist Dr. Louis Leakey. Dr. Galdikas was one of three female primatologists mentored and supported by Dr. Leakey in the early 1970s (together with Jane Goodall, studying chimpanzees in Tanzania, and Dian Fossey, studying gorillas in Rwanda). Challenged by Dr. Leakey to apply modern field research methods to orangutan conservation in Indonesia, Dr. Galdikas and the Orangutan Foundation International (OFI), the

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non-profit organization she founded, have operated from TPNP's Camp Leakey continuously for 36 years. Dr. Galdikas' work has been featured over the years by National Geographic, and her book, REFLECTIONS OF EDEN, details the remarkable and substantial contributions to orangutan conservation she and OFI have made.

U.S. Programs and Senators Help GOI Halt Logging

16. (U) With U.S. support, World Education and Orangutan Foundation International have collaborated to further unite the interests of the park and nearby villages. By acting as a bridge between the villagers and the park authorities, both the World Education and OFI staff provide visible, daily evidence of support for the communities. OFI set up participatory patrolling of the park with community members, WE, OFI staff and the national park rangers. OFI established 17 guard posts at strategic locations in the park and currently manages patrol operations in cooperation with the national park rangers. Together, OFI and the park rangers provide extensive ground coverage and protection to the core of the park. The U.S. delegation spoke with OFI patrol guards at Pondok Tangui guard post.

The guards emphasized the importance of the central government's crackdown, "Operation Wanalaga," in 2003, in which President Megawati, upon receiving a letter from 12 U.S. Senators, deployed national police to remove illegal loggers from TPNP. From that point on, the local patrols effectively brought illegal logging to a halt in TPNP, an outstanding success that continues to this day.

17. (U) The U.S. delegation also visited Kubu Village and Sekonyer Village, both located on the edges of the park. The subdistrict and village heads of these as well as other communities surrounding TPNP thanked the delegation and USAID for the agricultural assistance provided to them through World Education initiatives. The World Education program has improved rice yields up to three-fold and greatly improved vegetable, medicinal, rubber, and agroforestry yields as well as animal husbandry in neighboring communities. By improving livelihoods and problem solving skills in community forums, World Education's activities have reduced the level of threat from farming, fires, and hunting inside the Park. Many former illegal loggers who later received natural resources

education on sustainable forestry management through the World Education and OFI programs now either work on park patrols or on successful, legally profitable farms outside the park.

18. (U) A key threat to TPNP and its orangutan is the proposal by the newly created Seruyan district government--whose jurisdiction covers the Eastern side of TPNP--to reduce the size of the park and convert 16,000 hectares inside the park (4% of its total area) to palm oil concessions. Seruyan District also proposes to convert an additional 20,000 hectares of orangutan habitat adjacent to the park to three palm oil plantations. The Ministry of Forestry has so far refused permission to the Seruyan district. The Charge d'Affaires offered to discuss the pending proposal with the Minister of Forestry and to stress the important biodiversity conservation value of this primary forest and the negative consequences of its conversion. Given the vast areas of deforested land that are available and undeveloped in Kalimantan and Sumatra, there is no justification for clearing primary forest for palm oil.

19. (U) Indonesia has made considerable progress in combating illegal logging in recent years nationwide. Soon after he became president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono declared 'war' on illegal logging in a November, 2004 speech near Tanjung Puting National Park. Similar commitments were made at the Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI) meeting in January, 2005. In March of that same year a presidential decree to stop illegal logging (Inpres 4/2005) was issued, forming an 18-agency task force. The Inpres was followed by "Operation Hutan Lestari," a large scale program to address illegal logging. Since the President's speech and the Indonesian government's follow-up efforts, illegal loggers have left Tanjung Puting and many other sites throughout Kalimantan and Sumatra, particularly in places with enforcement patrols. The Ministry of Forestry has developed a national orangutan conservation strategy and aims to apply it to influence land use decisions. Other major donors and international NGOs are providing assistance to the GOI for forest conservation, both focused on specific sites and at the national policy level. The U.S.-supported program is coordinating with the GOI and a range of key players in forestry and orangutan conservation to ensure maximum synergy and program impact.

110. (U) The Charge d'Affaires and Mission Director flew over Tanjung Puting National Park to observe the scope and scale of the threats to the orangutan habitat. Illegal logging, slash and burn agriculture, and fires have damaged nearly forty percent of the park's forests. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the largest fire in all of human history took place there last year. By boat, the delegation also visited zircon sand mining operations on the park border that have left vast, deforested areas in places that should serve as forest buffer zones. U.S.-supported OFI park patrols have

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assured that mining has not spread into the park.

Forest Habitat is Key to Survival of the Orangutan

111. (U) The group traveled by boat to Camp Leakey, OFI's base of field operations in TPNP. Camp Leakey offers visitors an opportunity to see semi-wild orangutan at close range, as it has become a refuge for ex-captive orangutan. Forest conversion, fires, mining and logging have shrunk habitat, leaving many orangutans orphaned. Plantation workers and loggers shoot the mother and attempt to sell the baby orangutan. Officials or concerned individuals routinely rescue orphaned orangutans from the illicit pet trade. Indonesia now has over 1,000 orangutan held in various forms of captivity, of which a small number are being gradually reintroduced into the wild. The availability of intact forest habitat is, however, a severely limiting factor, particularly since lowland forest is more easily accessible for logging and conversion to palm oil plantations compared to mountainous forest. However, orangutans live in low elevation forest, ideally peat swamp forest. Thus, the highest conservation value will result from protecting the remaining lowland habitat of populations in the wild, in Tanjung Puting and in other key forests in Kalimantan and Sumatra.

112. (U) The U.S.-supported Orangutan Conservation Services Program (OCSP) will build on previous programs at the site level in

Kalimantan and Sumatra for sustainable and community-based forest management and improved law enforcement. But since larger threats require intervention at the national level, OCSP will also add support to GOI policy efforts and coordinate private sector and government partnerships to set aside and protect high conservation value orangutan habitat. The program further aims to set up an umbrella forum and fund for orangutan conservation, providing various groups a neutral focal point for advocacy and long-term support toward the common goal of ensuring the long-term survival of the orangutan.

COMMENT: (U) USAID's Orangutan Conservation Services Program is a crucial part of the U.S. Government's effort to protect and promote Indonesia's orangutan population, tropical rainforest and biodiversity. This effort fits into the efforts here to help Indonesia cut its greenhouse gas emissions.

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